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STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 236

SUBJECT: Developments in Rhee-Assembly Situation

1. In telephone conversation with the OIR Korean specialist, C. Norred, this morning I learned that Northeast Asian Branch of the Department of State had recommended strong US action to insure constitutional processes in the ROK. Such action has not been implemented to date however, because of opposition or indecision at highest US policy levels.

2. In Korea, Rhee is continuing strong arm tactics. His latest move has been to threaten the Assembly with dissolution unless it passes his constitutional amendment providing for popular election of the President and a bicameral Assembly by noon on 3 June.

3. At the same time, however, there are indications that opposition Assemblymen remain firm, that ROK military Chiefs of Staff are very much concerned over Rhee's involvement of the military in politics, that present Prime Minister Chang Taeck Sang is exhibiting considerable courage in opposing Rhee's various maneuvers, and that many of Rhee's former supporters are disassociating themselves from his current moves. Moreover, there are some indications that military elements may attempt to employ force against Rhee, even should General Van Fleet refuse to give tacit consent to the diversion of regular units to the Pusan area.

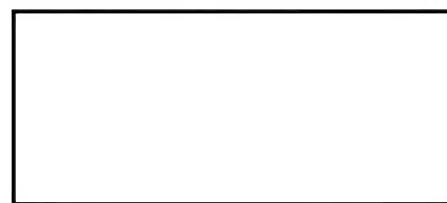
4. It is the feeling of the OIR specialists and the Northeast Asian Branch, Department of State, that in view of these trends the consequences of strong US action to restore constitutional processes would be productive of less disorder and more security in the short run -- and especially in the longer run -- than would be the case if Rhee is left to terrorize his opposition into temporary submission.

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5. Since there appear to be some differences of opinion -- from the intelligence point of view -- of the relative strength of the various factions involved and a strong difference of opinion as to the consequences of certain courses of action, a request for a special estimate on a "crash" basis may be forthcoming from the Department of State at an early date.



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